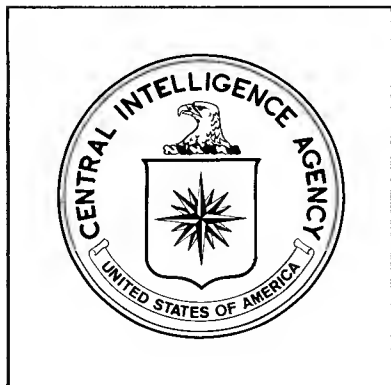


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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

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India-Sikkim

Another Step

The small semi-autonomous kingdom of Sikkim came closer to full incorporation within India this week. The latest events brought sharp attacks on New Delhi's "expansionist" policies by both Pakistan and China.

2 Sikkim's hereditary ruler, the Chogyal, was deprived of one of the last vestiges of independent power on April 9 when his largely ceremonial 400-member palace guard was disarmed, after a brief fight, by Indian troops stationed in Sikkim. The Indians acted in response to a request from the Chief Minister of Sikkim, a long-time opponent of the Chogyal. The following day the Sikkimese legislature voted unanimously to abolish the monarchy and seek full statehood in the Indian Union. On April 14, Sikkimese voters, in a hastily arranged referendum, ratified by overwhelming margins both legislative acts. The Chogyal now appears to be under palace arrest in Gangtok.

The latest events follow several months of increasing tension between the Chogyal and the elected government led by the Chief Minister. Both sides have accused the other of instigating attempted assassinations. The Chief Minister repeatedly has called on New Delhi to intervene and remove the Chogyal, who is accused of refusing to abide by the constitution.

For the past two years the Indian government has followed an ambiguous course, intent on retaining or expanding its role under a 1950 treaty as protector of the small but strategically important state but reluctant to remove the Chogyal. In 1973 New Delhi intervened in Sikkim following disorders in Gangtok and was instrumental in establishing a new constitutional order that relegated the Chogyal to a figure-head role while giving the legislature all effective power. Last September the Indian parliament voted to make Sikkim an associate state.

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2 New Delhi claims to have tried to mediate between the Chogyal and the Chief Minister but recently made clear publicly that its sympathies lay with the Chief Minister and his supporters. Statements by the Chogyal to the press emphasizing Sikkim's "separate identity" and his meetings with foreign diplomats during his attendance at the coronation of the Nepalese king in February apparently angered officials in New Delhi.

1 The Indians can now be expected to take the necessary constitutional action to make Sikkim the twenty-second Indian state. Attempts to rally support for the Chogyal and against incorporation of Sikkim into India can be handled easily by Indian police and the approximately 100,000 Indian troops in the state. The Chogyal presumably will be forced into exile.

3 Islamabad, which continues to fear what it regards as India's hegemonic designs on South Asia, issued an official statement on April 11 denouncing the events in Sikkim as Indian "annexation by force." The statement accused New Delhi of again demonstrating a predilection to use force in ordering its relations with its smaller neighbors.

4 Articles in the Chinese press have condemned New Delhi's "expansionist" actions and have alleged--as Peking did last September--that the Soviets are backing the Indians in these moves. The comments contain no threats, however, and are generally lower key than the Chinese reaction last year.

1 Events in Sikkim will be of great concern in both Nepal and Bhutan where distrust of Indian intentions toward its Himalayan neighbors already existed. Both governments, aware of their nations' economic dependence on Indian goodwill, will be wary of expressing their fears publicly. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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